

Personal Reflections on the Teaching Facilities offered at the City Campus

Stephen Hicks

University of Worcester

(s.hicks@worc.ac.uk)

Well, I have been teaching here for just over 6 weeks now so what are my thoughts so far? I think the building has presence; as you approach it through the gates it does strike you as being an attractive building, something you might expect to see on a visit to a National Trust property. I mention this in the context of teaching and learning because to my mind it does “set the scene” and focuses the mind on the job in hand; outside the gates you are a pedestrian; within the precincts of the City Campus you are here to learn (and teach). The impression inside the building continues the theme - it looks and feels clean and efficient but at the same time has a pleasing style. I'll have to read up now on the impact of the built environment on teaching and learning, but as an uncorroborated personal reflection I think there is an impact.

But what of the experience within? I'll talk first about two rooms of which I have personal experience – CH2001 and CH2006. A comment common to both is that is nice to go from office to teaching room without having to leave the building.

CH2001 is a flat bedded room with seats for about 80 students – they are bolted together (the seats that is). It is fairly long and thin with a lectern position slightly off centre down one of the long sides. There is a central screen with two flanking flat panel monitors, which replicate the image on the central screen. The lectern includes PC screen, keyboard and mouse, control panel, microphone and a visualiser. As a room for a lecture it works okay, except the presence of the flanking monitors does mean that a sizeable chunk of the students may be looking away from you, which I did find a little off-putting when first experienced. Another point to note is that if you wander away from the lectern microphone, you may become inaudible to students towards the back. Personally I like to prowling around a bit but it seems my prowling days are over (unless I go to reception to pick up a radio mike, set it up, forget to take it back etc). Another inhibition to my meandering is the presence of a thick black umbilical cord, on the floor, from the lectern to the wall. The visualiser is a good facility; it makes it very easy to incorporate newspaper articles and so on into the session and with a blank piece of paper can be used in lieu of a flip chart. The switch from PC to visualiser and back again can be a little slow. An issue from the student perspective is that there are no fold down desk tops on the chairs; some students report that they find this makes it difficult to take down notes; others seem to cope perfectly well.

CH2006 is set up with eight islands of desks, seating 6 students in a circular fashion. The lectern and main screen is at one of the short sides, and there are three flat panel monitors arranged around the room. I enjoy using this room; the layout of the desks encourages working in groups and there is enough space for me to wander around (I have to get a meander in at some point in the day!). The room also provides a large moveable white board, which is good, but you can't use the bottom half of it as view of it is obscured by the students immediately in front of it. One thing the room lacks is a remote control to be able to control the PC – for example to flip between Powerpoint slides or web pages. There is a break out area attached to CH2006, and I have designs on using this in a Corporate Finance module, where teams can develop a takeover strategy before making their pitch. A small grumble with the lectern facilities is that the mouse cable seems rather short and that the USB ports are all situated on the system box within the cupboard. Perhaps a USB fly lead might help here? These niggles apply to CH2001 as well.

In addition to these rooms, the presence of open access PC's has enabled me to task students with consulting web based resources and then presenting their findings to the group as whole. This enables an easier and more productive engagement with the real world than might be afforded by my producing a variety of handouts on the same topic.

Although I am situated much closer to teaching rooms, and hence student foot fall, than I was at Bredon, there does not appear to be an increase in the number of cold calls from students. I would say though that the offices as set up were not supplied with any chairs for visitors; this deficiency has now been recognised. The building itself contains enough "nooks and crannies" if a more private conversation with a student is needed.

On balance, I think the new Campus provides a much enhanced facility compared to much of the St John's Campus and so far I have enjoyed using the rooms. Next semester I'll be using the computer labs – which could be interesting.